

News Update on Religion and Church in China October 29 – December 4, 2024

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The “News Update on Religion and Church in China” appears regularly in each issue of Religions & Christianity in Today’s China (RCTC). Since the editorial staff learns of some items only later, it can happen that there are chronological overlaps between “News Updates” of two consecutive issues of RCTC. In these cases stories referred to in earlier “News Updates” will not be repeated. All “News Updates” can be found online at the website of the China-Zentrum (www.china-zentrum.de). – The last “News Update” (RCTC 2024, No. 4, pp. 4-23) covered the period June 21 – Oct. 27, 2024.

Religious Policy

November 1, 2024:

New regulations issued for teachers and academic degrees of institutes for religious education

On November 1, the National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA) issued “Measures for Qualification Certification and Professional Title Assessment of Teachers of Institutes for Religious Education” (宗教院校教师资格认定和职称评审办法) and “Measures for Conferment of Academic Titles by Institutes for Religious Education” (宗教院校学衔授予办法) (NRAA Decrees No. 20 and 21). The two documents replace the corresponding measures for trial implementation that have been in force since January 2013 (German translations on www.china-zentrum.de/en/ under “Documents on Religion and Politics”). The new “measures” are somewhat shorter in terms of the number of paragraphs than the old ones. A comparison of the content of the old and new versions is still pending. Institutes for religious education serve to train religious personnel. The Chinese text of the new measures can be found at: www.sara.gov.cn/static/content/ywdt/qtyw/2024-11-01/1306305934724694016.html. *kwt*

November 19, 2024:

Summit Forum “Talking about the Dao by the Sea” 2024 in Shanghai on the topic of “Sinicization of the System of Religious Administration”

The very large-scale conference was organized by the Shanghai United Front Department and the Shanghai Municipal Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau under the guidance of the National Religious Affairs Administration (NRAA). Most of the participants came from Shanghai. During the main forum

in the morning with 250 participants, Prof. Xu Yihua from Fudan University spoke, among others; young Shanghai religious personnel from the five religions exchanged views on measures to standardize religious administration at the grassroots level. In the afternoon, subforums of the five religions of Shanghai took place in parallel. The Buddhist subforum had 250 participants, the Protestant subforum 130, and the Catholic subforum had almost 200 priests and sisters. The NRAA report does not give any figures for the Daoist and Islamic subforums.

At the Catholic subforum, He Jian of the Shanghai Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau and Shanghai Bishop Shen Bin unveiled a sign for the newly established “Guangqi Research Center for the Sinicization of Shanghai Catholicism” (上海天主教中国化光启研究中心). According to the report, the new center will research the fusion of Catholicism and traditional Chinese culture, promote intercultural dialogue, and build an academic platform for the Sinicization of Chinese Catholicism by establishing a resource center and an e-book center, among others.

“Talking about the Dao by the Sea” (海上论道) was established in 2020 by the Shanghai United Front Department and the Shanghai Municipal Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau as a “brand for religious work” (*Weiyang zongjiao* Nov. 21, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/1Plxn6L_aRRMIRxVpbUbbw). *kwt*

Daoism

October 29–30, 2024:

“2nd China-Southeast Asian Countries Cultural Series Activities on Taoist City God Belief”

The series of events took place in Suzhou. The main organizer was the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA). In addition to representatives of the CDA and the religious authorities, leaders of Daoist communities from Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau took part in the exchange. Li Fuguang, President of the CDA, said at the opening that the City God culture is an important expression of Eastern wisdom, a bridge for cultural exchange between China and the Southeast Asian countries and the spiritual home of many overseas Chinese. David Herman Jaya, Chairman of the Sanjiao Temples Association of Indonesia, expressed the hope that these events would help Daoist believers in Southeast Asia to better understand the City God culture. At the closing ceremony, a “City God Belief and Culture Initiative” was adopted, which, among other things, advocates giving greater emphasis to the promotion of good and the punishment of evil as values of the City God belief. The City God Temple of Suzhou and the Daoist Tow Boo Kong Temple (北海斗母宫) in Butterworth, Penang (Malaysia), signed a temple friendship agreement (www.taoist.org.cn Oct. 30). The first conference on the culture of the City God belief in China and Southeast Asia took place in July 2021 as an online event, see *RCTC* 2021, No. 4, p. 8. *kwt*

November 1–8, 2024:

Conferring of the first registers (2024) to 368 domestic priests and priestesses of Zhengyi Daoism

“With the approval of the National Religious Affairs Administration,” the eight-day ceremony of ordination by conferring the first registers (初授箒) took place at the Celestial Master’s Mansion on Longhushan in Jiangxi Province. 368 Daoists from 20 provinces took part and first took written exams on November 2. The report on the website of the Chinese Daoist Association, the main organizer of the event, also mentions the presence of representatives of the local United Front Department of the

Party and the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau of Jiangxi Province, who offered congratulations and admonitions (www.taoist.org.cn Nov. 4, 8). *kwt*

November 13–17, 2024:

Ordination of 396 foreign priests and priestesses of Zhengyi Daoism

This ordination by conferring the registers also took place in the Celestial Master's Mansion. The 396 Daoists came from Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, Cambodia, the USA, Canada, England, France, Belarus, Denmark and Australia, as well as from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. On October 28, the board of the Chinese Daoist Association adopted “Provisions on the Ordination of Foreign Daoist Priests of the Zhengyi Tradition by Conferring the Registers (Revision Draft)” (关于国外正一派道士授箓的规定 [修订稿]) (www.taoist.org.cn Oct. 29; Nov. 15, 17). *kwt*

Buddhism

November 8, 2024:

International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) reports the closure of another monastery school

According to ICT, the Taktsang Lhamo Monastery School in Dzoge (Chinese: Ru'ergai) County in the Ngaba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, has been closed. Over 500 underage monks were enrolled there, who, according to ICT, were forcibly transferred from the Tibetan Buddhist monastery school to state-run schools by the authorities “in recent months.” According to information from *Radio Free Asia*, they are taught exclusively in Chinese in the state-run schools and are not allowed to see their parents. Four young monks from the Taktsang Lhamo Monastery School who opposed this transfer were arrested on October 2 for “political re-education” and, after their release on October 6, were forcibly placed in a state boarding school, according to ICT. According to the ICT, the state policy of removing underage monks from Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and sending them to state schools has long been strictly implemented in many parts of Tibet, but the Taktsang Lhamo Monastery School was able to operate largely normally until recently (www.rfa.org Oct. 24, 31; www.savetibet.org Nov. 8).

According to Article 34 of the “Measures for the Administration of Institutes for Religious Education” of 2021, students at such institutions “must generally have reached the age of 18 and have completed at least a regular junior middle school.” *kwt*

November 23, 2024:

Conference “Chinese Buddhist Architecture from the Perspective of Humanistic Buddhism” in Tianjin

The main organizer of the conference was the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA). At the conference – according to a report on the CBA website – everyone agreed that Buddhist architecture is an important part of China's excellent traditional architectural culture and a typical example of the Sinicization of Buddhism. Over 20 experts took part in the exchange; here are some examples:

Liu Jun, head of the supervisory board of the Beijing Buddhist Association, described the Lama Temple in Beijing as a “case study of the Sinicization of Buddhist architecture” because it skillfully merges the style of Tibetan Buddhist buildings with forms of Chinese palace architecture.

Dharma Master Shenkai, Professor at the Department of Philosophy at Qinghua University, spoke about the monastery as a “social space” with many functions: “space of the sacred” (place of spreading the Dharma, meeting the spiritual needs of the population), “space of life” (place of residence of monks, place of charity), etc. He suggested researching monasteries as “places of relationships.”

Qing Meng, Head of the Education Department of the CBA, explained: In the new era, the party and government demanded that religious architecture above all identify with politics, integrate into culture and adapt to society; when sinicizing Buddhist buildings, attention should be paid to a balance between “solemn” and “economical.”

Dharma Master Mingyue, Abbot of the Doushuai Temple in Baoding, explained that the largely completed urbanization of China will also lead to changes in monastery architecture. He said that it is no longer realistic to build traditional monastery complexes with a sequence of courtyards. He also advocated the use of building materials such as steel, concrete and glass as well as the use of modern sound and light technologies in temple construction (www.chinabuddhism.com.cn Nov. 25, 27). *kw*

November 28, 2024:

Chinese Buddhist Academy holds conference to establish new journal *Fayuan* 法源 (Source of Dharma)

While maintaining the correct political orientation, the new journal should serve Buddhist scientific research, Buddhist cultural exchange and the training of Buddhist talents, it was said at the conference. The journal should be of high quality in terms of content, editing and printing technology and become leading and influential through high-level theoretical research results. Chen Ruifeng, vice minister of the United Front Department of the Communist Party of China and head of the National Religious Affairs Administration, also spoke at the conference in Beijing. *Fayuan* is a publicly distributed Chinese-language quarterly. The first issue was published in September – according to the report (www.chinabuddhism.com.cn Nov. 29). – The Chinese Buddhist Academy is based in the Fayuan Temple in Beijing’s Xuanwu district. *kw*

December 4, 2024:

Buddha tooth relic from Beijing comes to Thailand for 73 days – intergovernmental agreement

On October 29, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian confirmed that “China agreed to convey the sacred Buddha tooth relic from Lingguang Temple in Beijing to Bangkok for 73-days enshrinement” “at the invitation of the Thai government and in celebration of the sixth-cycle or 72nd birthday of King of Thailand Maha Vajiralongkorn Phra Vajiraklaochaoyuhua and the 50th anniversary of China-Thailand diplomatic relations in 2025.” The relic has already been loaned abroad six times since the founding of the PRC, said Lin Jian.

On December 3, Chen Ruifeng, vice minister of the United Front Department of the Communist Party of China and head of the National Religious Affairs Administration, and Chousak Sirinil, minister of the Prime Minister’s Office of Thailand and head of the National Office for Buddhism, signed an agreement between the two countries on the dispatch of the relic.

On December 4, the relic landed at Don Mueang military airport, where Thai and Chinese monks conducted a recitation ceremony, attended by Chen Ruifeng and Chousak Sirinil, Thailand’s Deputy Prime Minister Suriya Jungrunreangkit and the Chinese ambassador. The relic was then taken in procession

to Sanam Luang in Bangkok, where it was placed in a pavilion under the leadership of Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra. Until February 14, it can be venerated there daily from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. (www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202410/t20241029_11517636.html; *Bangkok Post* Dec. 5; *The Nation* [Thailand] Dec. 5; *Thai.News* Dec. 5; *Zhongguo xinwenwang* according to www.chinabuddhism.com.cn Dec. 3). *kwt*

Islam

October 29, 2024:

New partial translation of the Koran: Chinese Islamic Association (CIA) holds colloquium on its publication

The title of the new publication is *Gulanjing jixuan jianzhu (Zhongwen ban)* 古兰经节选简注 (中文版) (Selected Verses of the Koran with a Short Commentary [Chinese Edition]). To mark the publication of this edition, the CIA held a colloquium on October 29. It was said at the colloquium that the Selected Verses are an important result of the Sinicization of Islam, and that their dissemination will further deepen the Sinicization. It was further said that the new publication should be used as a textbook for the Koran institutes and that imams should be trained so that they correctly understand the content of the new edition. The colloquium report published by the United Front Department of the CCP does not mention who edited the new Koran translation. Chen Ruifeng, vice minister of the United Front Department and head of the National Bureau of Religious Affairs, attended the colloquium. On November 27, the Islamic Association of Jinan (Shandong) held a training session for 80 imams on the new partial translation of the Koran. It was proposed to compile a collection of sermons on the new translation. It was also said that the imams would be instructed on how to use the new translation to integrate the Islamic concepts of peace, the Middle Way and tolerance into the daily lives of Muslims. The *Voice of America* (VOA) reported that there is a fear among Islamic scholars abroad that the party wants to use the new partial translation to change the core content and interpretation of Islam in the name of inculturation. A CIA employee interviewed by VOA said that the plan to retranslate the Koran, which could not be implemented under several generations of leaders before, is now being pushed forward and implemented with great determination under Xi Jinping. According to the CIA employee, the translation of the full text of the Koran is currently being corrected and should soon be printed. Islamic experts recognized by the CIV and heads of the Arabic departments of major Chinese universities are involved in the work, the CIA employee told VOA. VOA also reported (without citing a source) that in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region the government has begun confiscating old copies of the Koran and distributing revised copies (*Tongzhan xinyu* according to www.sara.gov.cn Oct. 29; www.chinaislam.net.cn December 2; www.voachinese.com Nov. 14). *kwt*

November 11–23, 2024:

29th UN Climate Change Conference: Secretary General of Muslim Council of Elders and Abbot of Shaolin Monastery exchange on global change

The Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Elders, Judge Mohamed Abdelsalam, and the “CEO” (abbot) of the Shaolin Buddhist Monastery in China's Henan Province, Shi Yongxin, met on the sidelines of the 29th World Climate Change Conference, held from November 11 to 23 in Azerbaijan's capital Baku. The Muslim Council of Elders is an international body of influential Islamic scholars based

in Abu Dhabi and headed by Ahmed al-Tayyib, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo. According to the report on the Muslim Council of Elders' website, Judge Abdelsalam and Abbot Yongxin spoke about the importance of joint efforts by religious leaders to address global challenges. The report said that Abbot Yongxin praised the historic "Document on Human Fraternity" that Grand Imam Ahmed al-Tayyib and Pope Francis signed in Abu Dhabi in 2019. According to the report, he also praised the "Faith Pavilion" initiative launched at COP28 in Dubai, calling it a practical step to involve religious leaders in climate change efforts. Discussion sessions were held in the Faith Pavilion at COP29, attended by 97 organizations representing 11 religions (www.muslim-elders.com Nov. 17; *KNA* Nov. 4, 2022 according to www.domradio.de). *kwt*

Protestant Churches

November 3, 2024:

Measures against unregistered congregations

On November 3, Sunday gatherings of Protestant groups were simultaneously ended by police forces in various places in the country. According to an eyewitness report, a house church in Nanjing was stormed by more than 50 people, consisting of security officers from various units, including the religious authority. When entering the hall, they shouted: "Don't move, put away your cell phones, talking is prohibited." Eight people were arrested, including church elders and the pastor. All other people present were photographed and had to give their personal details. The arrested people were released the following day, citing the illegality of the unregistered religious gathering and the imposition of more severe punishment in the event of a repeat offense.

On the same day, police actions against unregistered congregations also took place in Changsha. The Changsha Grace Light Church (长沙恩光教会) was particularly affected, a community that was considered the largest house church in Hunan with more than 1,000 members until it was officially banned in 2008. The congregation reacted to the ban by splitting up into smaller groups that meet separately. On November 3, a church service with around 300 participants in a rented hotel conference room was broken up by officials; personal details were taken and some cell phones confiscated. Although no arrests were made in the case, the congregation leaders are concerned about their safety and have turned to other house churches and human rights organizations for support and prayers (*Bitter Winter* Nov. 13; www.chinaaid.net/2024/11/blog-post_39.html). *Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

November 19, 26 and 30, 2024:

Foundation stone laying ceremonies for reconstruction of church property

The Huanggang Church in Chaozhou, Guangdong Province, which was demolished in 1989 due to urban planning, is being reconstructed after a long period of temporary construction. The ceremonial groundbreaking took place on November 19 with great participation. Pastor Guo Yun, president of the Guangdong Provincial Christian Council, emphasized the symbolic value of the church building for the integration of the growing Christian community in the region. The Huanggang Church was founded over 150 years ago. Its traditional contribution to social and economic development should be continued, Pastor Guo said, "contributing to the county's economic and social development while enhancing its reputation in foreign exchanges as a hometown of overseas Chinese."

On November 26, a foundation stone laying ceremony for the reconstruction of Protestant church property took place in the Changxindian 长辛店 district in western Beijing. Over 100 people attended

the ceremony. Pastor Wu Weiqing, chairman of the Beijing Three-Self-Organization, thanked the local authorities for their support in realizing the project and gave an introduction into the construction plans.

A few days later, on November 30, a foundation stone was laid in the same style for the reconstruction of church property of the Jiangnan Church (江南教会) in the city of Panzhihua 攀枝花 in Sichuan Province. 800 people from the surrounding area and from all social groups involved, including personnel involved in construction, supervision and design, came together for the event. In his sermon, the president of the Sichuan Christian Council, Pastor Zhao Gang, explained the promise of the reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in Daniel 9:25. 1,800 m² are to be built on a site of 0.38 hectares. “The design will integrate ethnic cultural elements, the architecture style of western Sichuan, and the characteristics of the Chinanization of Christian churches,” says the official report (www.chinachristiandaily.com Dec. 2; <https://en.ccctspm.org> Dec. 3, 4). *Isabel Friemann, China InfoStelle*

Catholic Church

October to the end of November 2024:

Four conferences on the Sinicization of Catholicism – in Qingdao, Shanghai, Suzhou and Beijing

On October 25-26, a forum on the Sinicization of Catholicism in Shandong Province was held in Qingdao. It was organized by the official Catholic bodies of Shandong and the Society for Ethnic and Religious Studies of Shandong Province. Among the 80 participants were Bishops Fang Xingyao (Linyi) and Lü Peisen (Yanzhou). A central theme was the process of Catholicism taking root in Shandong, the home of Confucianism, and the compatibility of the Confucian noble model with Catholic teaching.

On October 29, an exchange of sermons on the Sinicization of the Catholic administrative system took place in Shanghai under the motto “Shanghai’s Catholicism Talks about the Dao by the Sea.” The organizers were Shanghai’s three Catholic bodies and the diocese. Reports from outside China varied widely in their perception of the event, with headlines ranging from “Shanghai Catholic Bishop Shen Bin announces his program: Study Xi Jinping, not the Pope” (*Bitter Winter*) to “Shanghai: 230 attend seminar on intensifying pastoral activities in the diocese” (*Vatican News*).

From November 6 to 8, the “5th Yushan Forum” for systematically promoting the Sinicization of Catholicism in the Yangtze Delta was held in Suzhou, hosted by the official Catholic bodies of Jiangsu Province. Bishop Shen Bin, representing the national Catholic governing bodies, explained that people from the Catholic circles of Jiangsu, Shanghai, Zhejiang and Anhui, as well as academics, had also been invited; he hoped that this would lead to a wonderful spark and open a new chapter in the love for the country and the religion. Bishops Xu Honggen (Suzhou), Lu Xinping (Nanjing), Jin Yangke (Ningbo) and Liu Xinhong (Anhui) also took part in the 5th Yushan Forum.

On November 30, the 9th Conference on the Sinicization of the Theological Thought of Beijing Catholicism took place under the motto “Forum on the Dao of Heaven.” Lectures were given on historical Catholic figures who had made contributions to the Sinicization of Catholicism, including Matteo Ricci, Vincent Lebbe, Celso Costantini, Ma Xiangbo, Ying Lianzhi and Fu Tieshan. Bishop Li Shan (Beijing) and his coadjutor bishop Zhen Xuebin took part in the conference. It was chaired by Fr. Li Jianguang (director of the Beijing Catholic Theological Research Office; he completed a doctorate in Bochum, Germany, in 2022) and Fr. Zhang Bo (director of the office of the Beijing Diocesan Seminary) (www.xinde.org Oct. 30; Nov. 6, 13; Dec. 3; *Bitter Winter* Nov. 19; *Vatican News* Nov. 19). *kwt*

November/December 2024:

China's Catholic Church prepares for the Jubilee Year 2025

As *Xinde* and *Fides* report in several articles, the Catholic communities in China are preparing for the Jubilee Year 2025. The “Bull of indiction of the ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025” *Spes non confundit* was the subject of a study meeting of the diocese of Sanyuan on November 28. Bishop Joseph Han Yingjin, the bishop of the diocese, chaired the meeting during which all the priests and deacons of the diocese, together with the bishop, studied the bull in Chinese. According to a report by *Fides*, the aim was above all to find inspiration in the text for pastoral work in the individual parishes. The participants in the meeting exchanged ideas and suggestions for possible new initiatives such as pilgrimages and Bible courses that should be launched during the Holy Year. “On returning to their respective parishes, the priests and deacons began to distribute the Bull to the members of the parish community and to illustrate its content to each of the families, asking that during the Jubilee, the joy of the Gospel be manifested and embodied in the daily life of the baptized,” says *Fides*. For the Holy Year 2025, Pope Francis has determined that it will begin with the opening of the Holy Door on Christmas Eve in St. Peter's Basilica on December 24, 2024. During the course of 2025 there will certainly be numerous other reports from the Church in China (*Fides* Nov. 30; *www.xinde.org* Nov. 30; Dec. 2, 4). *kf*

November 16, 2024:

“Spiritual Purification” event for the youth groups of Beijing Diocese

16 youth groups from different parishes attended the meeting in St. Joseph's Church in Beijing's Xibeiwang District. It was organized by the diocese's Youth Pastoral Center and accompanied by the novices of the diocesan St. Joseph's Sisters. Death and remembrance of the dead were the focus of the day. Coadjutor Bishop Zhen Xuebin held a memorial Mass. He invited the young Catholics to prepare for the coming “Holy Year of Hope.” Afterwards, the young people went in procession to the Xibeiwang cemetery, where they held a memorial ceremony for the deceased missionaries, priests and believers, with bows, offerings of flowers and incense and sprinkling of holy water. Returning to the church, they heard a lecture by Teacher Zhang on the appreciation of life and the correct view of dying and death. The aim of the event was for young Catholics to develop a Christian view of life, understand the importance of the Communion of Saints and see death from the perspective of the resurrection. The young people should be relieved of their fear of cemeteries and funerals and be taught to respect the deceased, value life, be grateful to one another, care for the elderly and face the reality of life with a better spiritual attitude in order to be able to serve the Lord, the Church and society – according to the report from the Diocese of Beijing (*www.xinde.org/show/55892* – with photos). *kwt*

December 3, 2024:

The life of Jesus in Chinese for tourists in Europe

Under the aegis of Fr. Gianni Criveller PIME, editor-in-chief of *AsiaNews*, the Chinese translation of Severino Dianich's book, *Gesù. Un racconto per chi non ne sa nulla... o ha dimenticato* (“Jesus. A tale for those who know nothing ... or have forgotten”) was recently published. The original Italian version was published in 2019 by Edizioni San Paolo. The 64-page text, written in simplified Chinese characters, is entitled “耶稣的故事. 写给尚未认识耶稣及想重新认识祂的人耶稣的故事.” The translation, entitled “The New Testament of the Holy See” was presented at the *AsiaNews* conference “Youth and Faith in Greater China” on December 3 at the PIME Missionary Centre in Milan. It is “A new initiative

promoted by the PIME Foundation as an instrument of first evangelization for those who approach the places of the Christian tradition in Italy and Europe,” *AsiaNews* reported on December 2. The theologian Severino Dianich is a priest from Pisa and one of the founders of the Associazione Teologica Italiana. “I have never thought of offering a synthesis of Christian doctrine or, as was done in the 19th century, a text proposing ‘the essence of Christianity.’ Rather, I believe it is necessary to start from the story of Jesus,” explained Fr. Criveller, referring to the history of the translation. “I also do this during my lessons with Chinese students at the Catholic University of Milan. Before doctrine and precepts, I am convinced that Christianity is the encounter with Jesus and the experience of friendship with him.” “I had been thinking how to offer the many Chinese visiting cathedrals and places of Christian tradition in Italy and Europe a subsidy that would help them understand the deeper meaning of the place they were admiring, namely the Christian faith,” said Fr. Criveller, who has already presented the book on several occasions (*AsiaNews* Dec. 2; Italian and Chinese editions of the book). *kf*

Sino-Vatican Relations

November 9, 2024:

Conference “Historical legacy of the 2024 Concilium Sinense and the Guidelines of China-Vatican Relations” in Beijing

The seminar in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Concilium Sinense 1924 in Shanghai was organized by the Institute for the Study of Buddhism and Religious Theory of Renmin University in Beijing. The event was attended by academics and Catholic priests. According to a report in *Fides*, Fr. Peter Zhao Jianmin, director of the Institute for Catholicism and Culture in Beijing, discussed the impact of the First Chinese Council on the present and future of Catholicism in China. Prof. Leopold Leeb of Renmin University presented the Chinese priests who participated in the 1924 Council, while Prof. Liu Zhiqing of Anyang Normal University analyzed the impact of the 1924 Shanghai Council on promoting the inculturation of Catholicism in China. Prof. Zhong Zhifeng, a member of the host institute who organized the seminar, explained the “diplomatic game behind the 1924 Shanghai Council.” In the final round of discussions, the seminar participants discussed various highly topical issues, including “episcopal appointments, communion, diocesan adjustments, obstacles in diplomatic relations between China and the Vatican and possible steps” (*Agenzia Fides* Nov. 18). *kf*

November 15, 2024:

High-level symposium on Matteo Ricci at the Gregorian University in Rome

The one-day conference titled “Matteo Ricci: A Heritage of Friendship, Dialogue and Peace” on the person and work of the Jesuit missionary was organized by the Society of Jesus, the Jesuit Historical Archives and Georgetown University together with the Gregorian University. The morning was opened with words of welcome and introduction by Father Mark Lewis, SJ, Rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University, and Father Federico Lombardi, SJ, who works with the office of the General Postulator of the Society of Jesus for the cause of the beatification of the Venerable Matteo Ricci (Macerata 1552 – Beijing 1610) and moderated the conference. “The Jesuit’s work, especially with regard to the inculturation of Catholicism on Chinese soil, is linked to current events, as a beacon and reference point for the dialogue that has been going on for six years between the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China. This was reiterated several times by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, who, in a long and applauded speech, traced an excursus on the increasingly convinced and frequent thoughts

and words of the last three Popes on the topicality and importance of the figure of Matteo Ricci in the context of the Church's growing respect and interest for the different cultures of peoples," according to the report in *Vatican News*. Ricci is not so much a personality of the past, but a "prophetic" figure who nourishes the hope of encounters today and tomorrow. Jesuit General Arturo Sosa, SJ, and Cardinal Stephen Chow, SJ, of Hong Kong also spoke at the symposium. Cardinal Chow gave, among other things, an overview of the history of the Church in China from 1949 to the present day. The Chinese Catholic Church is now confronted with a new reality, said the Bishop of Hong Kong, and spoke of an ongoing "process" for which "dialogue" is essential. And "in order to have a dialogue, empathy is required": "Through empathy we can achieve a deeper mutual understanding." In the hope of "a truly Chinese Church." In the afternoon, various scholars delved more deeply into the significance of Matteo Ricci. The symposium was also officially announced in a Vatican press release (*Sunday Examiner* Nov. 22; *Vatican News* Nov. 15; <https://www.vaticannews.va/it/vaticano/news/2024-11/padre-matteo-ricci-convegno-gregoriana-parolin-chow-sosa.html>; www.jesuits.global/it/2024/11/19/matteo-ricci-un-eredita-di-amicizia-di-dialogo-e-di-pace). *kf*

December 4, 2024:

The Pope's general audience now also in Chinese

"And next week, with the Advent, the Chinese translation will also be here in the audience." This is what Pope Francis said at the general audience on November 27 in St. Peter's Square. According to *Vatican News*, so far, at general audiences, the scripture, short summaries of the Pope's address and greetings have been read out in Italian, English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Polish and Arabic. The texts are read out in various languages by employees of either the Vatican Secretariat of State or *Vatican News / Radio Vatican*. The premiere then took place on December 4. For the first time, the short version of the Pope's speech was also read out in Chinese. "It is with great joy that we begin reading the summary of the catechesis in Chinese today," the Pope announced. "I would therefore like to extend my warm greetings to the Chinese-speaking people present here and to those who are connected to us through the media. Upon all of you and your families I invoke joy and peace. May God bless you." Marta Zhao Nan, head of the Chinese office of Fides, who has worked there since 1998, read the passage from Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, the summary of the catechesis and the Pope's greetings in Chinese.

Vatican News also has a website in traditional and simplified Chinese characters and since 1950 an audio program in Chinese. In addition, a Chinese version of the official website of the Holy See (www.vatican.va) has been available since 2009 (*Fides* Nov. 27, Dec. 4; *Vatican News* Nov. 27, Dec. 4; www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/audiences/2024/documents/20241204-udienza-generale.html). *kf*

Hong Kong

November 8, 2024:

Meeting of high-ranking representatives of the Lutheran World Federation with Cardinal Chow

More than 100 people attended the Asian Church Leadership Conference (ACLC), which took place in Hong Kong from November 7 to 12. The meeting, which was attended by leaders of churches in 14 countries across Asia, was organized by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and hosted by the Lutheran Federation of Hong Kong. Participants also held discussions with the Anglican Archbishop of Hong Kong Andrew Chan Au-ming and the Catholic Bishop Cardinal Stephen Chow Sau-yan, SJ. Car-

dinal Chow welcomed the Lutheran representatives with the words: “We are brothers and sisters. You are more than friends to us.” He acknowledged the strong relationship between the Catholic Church and other Christian denominations. Vicar General Rev. Joseph Chan Wing-chiu, who is also chairman of the Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong, and Theresa Lumo Kung of the same commission presented the latest developments in ecumenism in Hong Kong (*Sunday Examiner* Nov. 15; <https://lutheranworld.org/de/news/asien-solidarisch-zusammenstehen-und-hoffnung-vermitteln>). *kf*

November 19, 2024:

Long prison sentences of up to ten years for 45 opposition ex-politicians and activists

In Hong Kong, a court has passed judgment on the members of the “Hong Kong 47” group. They were charged more than three years ago and have now received long prison sentences. The trial has been ongoing since 2023 and was the largest and most important to date for alleged violations of the national security law introduced in 2020, according to *Handelsblatt*. The charge was that they had organized illegal primaries before the elections to the Legislative Council, Hong Kong’s regional parliament, planned for 2020. “The unofficial primaries in July 2020, in which 610,000 voters ultimately took part, were intended to elect pro-democratic candidates who would then run in the official election,” *Handelsblatt* recalls. The defendants were guilty of endangering the state and violating the security law, it was said. “The government then postponed the parliamentary elections that were supposed to follow the disputed primaries due to the coronavirus pandemic.” Among the well-known faces is former student leader Joshua Wong; he was sentenced to four years and eight months in prison. Law lecturer Benny Tai received a ten-year prison sentence. Many of the defendants had pleaded guilty from the start. Cardinal Zen was among the spectators in the courtroom. In May, two activists from the Group of 47 were acquitted in a separate verdict. The court’s verdict on Jimmy Lai, the founder of the government-critical and long-closed *Apple Daily*, is still pending. As expected, support for the verdicts came from Beijing, but the verdict was received with great concern worldwide (*AsiaNews* Nov. 19; *China Table* Nov. 20; *Handelsblatt* Nov. 19). *kf*

November/December 2024:

Diocese of Hong Kong prepares for the Jubilee Year 2025

The diocese has launched a website with information about the jubilee year and pilgrimage sites in Hong Kong. The jubilee hymn and prayer for the 2025 jubilee, information about the granting of indulgences, the jubilee logo and the mascot are also listed, and much more. The website also contains information about the most important activities as part of the 2025 jubilee and the 80th anniversary of the diocese in 2026. The ceremonial opening in Hong Kong will take place on December 29 in the cathedral. An oil lamp with the “Light of Hope” will travel from one parish to another for two weeks each over the next two years. During this time, prayer meetings and other activities will take place in the individual parishes, also together with schools and the local community. There will be a large ecumenical youth meeting in early May 2025, and a “faith camp” for children in mid-June. In the first half of July, the relics of 100 saints will be exposed at two locations. There will be further religious activities in the second half of the year and in 2026 (address of the jubilee website: <https://jubilee2025.catholic.org.hk/en>; *Sunday Examiner* Nov. 29). *kf*

Singapore

November 9, 2024:

Singapore: Bishops appeal for “peace, compassion and forgiveness” after stabbing attack on Catholic priest

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei (CBCMSB) has called for prayers and healing after the priest Rev. Christopher Lee was stabbed during a Mass in Singapore. “Let us unite in asking our Heavenly Father for a swift and complete recovery for him, as well as for the consolation and courage of the faithful who have been impacted by this traumatic event,” said Archbishop Julian Leow Beng Kim of Kuala Lumpur, president of CBCMSB. The 57-year-old pastor of St. Joseph’s Church in Upper Buki Timah in Singapore was stabbed while distributing communion during Saturday evening Mass. He was taken to the National University Hospital of Singapore, where his condition was said to be stable. The alleged attacker, a 37-year-old Singaporean with a history of violence and drug-related crimes, was overpowered by parishioners and taken into custody by police. Authorities said the incident did not appear to be linked to terrorism. Cardinal William Goh, Archbishop of Singapore, stressed in a statement on November 10 that the incident was a reminder for the public to stay vigilant and value the peace and security that has been achieved (*Licas* Nov. 11). *kf*

Authors’ Abbreviations:

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